

## TESTIMONY

**Concetta Pucci, PhD, LGSW, LMSW**

**March 10, 2023**

---

Hello, my name is Dr. Concetta Pucci. I am a Field Program Assistant and Lecturer in the Social Work Department at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. Additionally, I am currently providing clinical therapy services with two agencies: National Deaf Therapy and Deaf REACH to earn my clinical hours.

This took me over 20 years to get where I am today and I am still not clinically licensed as a social worker yet because of language and accessibility barriers in taking exams.

Why? Because of my DeafBlind disability. I am testifying in supporting both bills – SB0871: Social Workers - Licensure Examinations - Moratorium and Workgroup and SB0872: State Board of Social Work Examiners- Temporary License to Practice Social Work. Here's my timeline story to give you an idea how hard it was and it still is.

May 2001: Graduated with Bachelors of Science in Social Work (BSSW) at Rochester Institute of Technology

May 2002: Graduated with Masters of Social Work (MSW) in an Advanced Standing Program at New York University.

Sept. 2002: Hired as a school social worker at Lexington School for the Deaf in New York City with a condition that I am required to be licensed by a deadline.

2002 - 2005: Took New York ASWB's Master-level social work exams 5 times. Failed by 1-4 points every time and I was so close to pass the exam. My NY accommodations were given as follows: (1) two extended hours given on the exam, (2) taking the exam in a private room, and (3) ASL interpreters to interpret only vocal instructions by the exam proctor.

- 2003: I was required to be a licensed school social worker in New York State so I was hired as a school social worker and was given a timeline to get my license. I had to apply to get a provisional social work license and was rejected because I failed a few exams previously. I had to get a “teacher’s certificate” which was a loophole in the system that I had to find ways to keep my job with the human resource manager and supervisor’s support. They knew that they needed to keep me because I am Deaf and needed to provide counseling services to deaf kids by using American Sign Language (ASL) in school.
- 2005: Took my 5th exam and failed once again so I basically gave up. I felt that I am repeating over and over which did not get me to move forward so I re-evaluated and decided to explore another career option that I can succeed in. That was a very emotionally traumatizing experience for me.
- 2006: The most difficult decision I had to make was leaving my job as I truly loved working with my students and I could not move forward without a license. I decided to quit my social work career and pursued to get my PhD at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C.
- 2012: Graduated with my PhD in Special Education Administration.
- 2015: I was still bothered that I am still not a licensed social worker. A little thing behind my head was telling me, “Let’s try one more time!” So I registered for DC 's ASWB exam. DC’s regulation of accommodations is different from NY as follows: (1) ASL interpreters for the exam proctor’s vocal instructions AND translating the English exam questions and multiple choice answers if needed, (2) taking the exam in the private room, and (3) four hours extended with lunch break. As a matter of fact, this was very helpful because some questions/answers were too challenging especially when two answers were TOO similar so I had interpreters translate them and I understood BETTER through ASL – my native language. After 10 years of hiatus from the social work practice, as a result, I FINALLY passed and got my LGSW in DC.
- 2019: Hired as a Field Program Assistant at Gallaudet University with an understanding that I am required to be clinical licensed to supervise student-interns. I started earning my clinical hours by working as a mental health therapist for Deaf REACH – supervised by LICSW.

2021: Got my LMSW in MD by endorsement. And, began my National Deaf Therapy work and supervised by both LICSW and LCSW-C.

March 2023: I have about 300 clinical hours left to go before taking my clinical license exam. Now, I am experiencing anxiety and fear of taking the exam again. Taking exams over and over is re-traumatizing. So terrified.

Who else would experience this kind of long journey to become a clinical licensed social worker? Us – the Black, Brown, Indigenous, People of Color, Individuals with Disabilities, Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard-of-Hearing members, Elders, those whose primary language is not English, and marginalized individuals. It is evident this is a long history of problematic issues that the ASWB licensing exam is not equitable and accessible. This does harm many of us – causing us trauma, pain, and harm. Passing these two bills would be part of the anti-racism movement in our profession which would increase more access to provide mental health services in the state of MD. Please support these two bills so others do not have to experience the same trauma as I did in my 20+ years and I do not have to experience re-trauma again when I take my clinical exam after I am done with my clinical hours this year.

Thank you for your time reading this very important testimony.

Respectfully submitted by Concetta Pucci, PhD, LGSW, LMSW  
[concetta.pucci@gallaudet.edu](mailto:concetta.pucci@gallaudet.edu)